

## Sackville Tribune Post

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Tantramar Flashback

# Reader enquiry pits the Post versus the Tribune

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Today's Flashback was inspired by an enquiry from a reader in Massachusetts. He had encountered the column "by accident on the Internet" while searching for family genealogical information. His question was: "Is the Sackville Tribune Post the result of an amalgamation of two newspapers? If so, why did this happen?"

The quick answer is that The Sackville Post and The Sackville Tribune were separate entities and bitter rivals prior to their becoming one in 1946.

The older of the two - The Sackville Post - was first published on May 12, 1870. In 1896, it was amalgamated with The Chignecto Borderer, and renamed The Semi-Weekly Post. Under the management of editor A. H. McCready, it now had a monopoly that lasted until the advent of The Sackville Tribune in 1902.

For the next 40 years, Sackville was to have the "benefit" of two rival newspapers.

A lead editorial in the first issue of "The Trib" introduced the new publication on Feb. 13, 1902: "Devoted to the interests of the county of Westmorland, and in particular the parishes of Sackville, Westmorland, Dorchester and Botsford, it believes in giving special prominence to the business and interests of (the county) and to let other counties 'boost' themselves."

The newspaper was not welcomed in certain quarters. The Conservative-leaning Sackville Post was at first charitably lukewarm; and noted that "The Tribune was well printed and presented a creditable appearance." The Post (as it was familiarly known) had by this time built a faithful readership.

Although Westmorland County was considered a Liberal stronghold, the Tantramar area traditionally voted Conservative. To succeed, The Tribune would have to carve out a place for a Liberal newspaper in Conservative Sackville.

With the benefit of hindsight, those who predicted an early death for The Sackville Tribune were underestimating the entrepreneurial drive of C. C. Avard (1875-1956), the owner and editor of the new enterprise.

It did not take long for the two newspapers to begin political rivalry. A provincial election was called for Feb. 28, 1903. The Liberal-oriented Tribune entered the contest with gusto. From the beginning of the campaign, Avard confidently predicted "We have not the slightest doubt that the Liberal Government (led by Hon. L. J. Tweedie (1849-1917)) will be returned."

Comments by the Conservative Opposition leader (J. Douglas Hazen (1860-1937)) and his followers were treated with scorn in the Tribune. Toward the end of the campaign, Avard became more blunt: "Since the Liberal government will be elected to power, what advantage is there in sending opposition candidates to Fredericton?" For the record, the Liberal government was returned, and the young editor's predictions were proven correct . . . this time.

Unfortunately, complete files of The Semi-Weekly Post and the later renamed Sackville Post are not available. The original files were lost in one of Sackville's many fires. This means a certain amount of detective work has to be undertaken to ascertain its precise stance on some issues; however, Avard's highly-charged rebuttals provide valuable clues. From the copies that have survived, the Post was clearly as partisan as the the 'Trib.

In 2009, it is easy to be critical of the "black and white" journalism practiced by these two newspapers. Yet it must be recognized that the same thing was happening in Moncton, with The Times versus The Transcript ; or in Saint John where The Telegraph squared off against The Journal .

The Sackville brand of uncompromising journalism also sold newspapers. During the first quarter of the 20th century, both The Post and The Trib prospered. Once the latter was on its feet and Avard had paid off a \$1,400 loan negotiated to start the paper, he established The Tribune Printing Company.

Throughout these early years, Avard continued to scout for new opportunities. In 1910, he established The Atlantic Advertising Agency and added regional advertising to his ever-expanding business interests.

The Sackville Tribune weathered the stormy days of World War One, the roaring '20s and even the depressing '30s with relative ease.

Over the years, the Tribune Press expanded its operations. During the 1920s, Avard took over publication of the monthly magazine The Busy East. Later, in 1933, it was renamed The Maritime Advocate. By this time the editorial policy and content of the magazine bore the unmistakable stamp of C.C. Avard.

Each year saw an increasing list of books published by the Tribune Press. Almost all were by Maritime authors and featured regional themes. Esther Clark Wright, Grace Helen Mowat, Will R. Bird, J. Clarence Webster and Roland Sherwood were among those whose works carried the imprint of Sackville's Tribune Press. One in particular, W.O. Raymond's The River St. John reached best-seller status, with three reprints.

Following the end of World War Two, change was in the air at both The Sackville Tribune and The Sackville Post. A.H. McCready retired from the helm of the latter in 1946. On

June 3 of the same year, The Post was combined with The Tribune and Sackville returned to being a one-newspaper town.

A year later, another important change took place. The Avard era came to an end with the purchase of the Tribune Press Limited by William B. Sawdon and Fred Johns. Later Sawdon was to buy his partner's shares in the company.

The new owner and publisher, a native of Mount Stewart, P.E.I., was a 1939 graduate of Mount Allison. Like other Tribune editors before and after him, he had an apprenticeship as editor-in-chief of Mount Allison's The Argosy .

A seasoned veteran of the Second World War, Sawdon served with the New Brunswick Rangers in the Western European and Italian campaigns. He brought to the Tribune Post not only a fresh outlook, but a new approach to journalism.

For the next 25 years, the destiny of The Sackville Tribune Post would rest on his shoulders. In the operation of the newspaper during Sawdon's watch, a subtle but important change took place. Less emphasis was placed on controversial national and regional topics; with more attention being given to local news and reporting.

One of Bill Sawdon's attributes was the ability to recognize talent in others. Over the years, the Tribune Post became a training ground for young reporters who subsequently were to find employment with major newspapers.

A good example was Ken Bagnell, a native of Glace Bay. While at Mount Allison he helped cover the local sports beat. Later he was employed by the United Church Observer, Toronto Star, and the Globe and Mail. Bagnell also served as editor of the Imperial Oil Review.

While it would be wrong to imply that the "new" Tribune Post was always neutral; however, from the Sawdon years onward, the newspaper presented a more balanced view of politics. During at least one election campaign, citizens were simply urged to: "vote as you like, but vote."

This did not mean that Sawdon ducked controversy or that he was "soft" on contentious issues. His oft-quoted motto was: "Where all men think alike, few think much." This too spoke volumes concerning his approach to journalism.

The next person to leave a major imprint on The Trib was C. W. Moffatt - better known as "Scoop" Moffatt.

He graduated from Mount A in 1937 and earned his nickname while news editor of The Argosy. "Scoop" regularly filed stories with no less than four dailies - two in Halifax and one each in Saint John and Moncton. Well "baptized" in printer's ink, he went on to serve The Tribune Post, first as an investigative reporter and later during the Sawdon years as editor. In each role, he exemplified the same work ethic and dedication.

One of Moffatt's important contributions was the compilation in 1946 of a handbook for "the most central town in the Maritimes." Endorsed by the Sackville Town Council and Board of Trade, it gained a wide circulation. Today the handbook provides a valuable snapshot of mid-20th century life in Sackville.

This column cannot possibly convey a complete history of The Tribune Post through to the present day. Beyond limits of space, there is another reason for brevity. It's much more difficult to be objective the closer one gets to 2009. Any serious analysis of recent years should be left to some future columnist . . . perhaps in 2109!

Ideas for, or comments about Tantramar Flashbacks, may be addressed to Bill Hamilton in care of the Sackville Tribune Post, 80 Main Street, Sackville, NB, E4L 4A7.